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AUTHOR Levy, Reynold
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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of liberal arts colleges that motivate AT&T and other business and industrial firms to provide financial support are discussed. AT&T believes that independent colleges emphasize teaching excellence, including instruction in small settings and face-to-face discussion. Students benefit by early emphasis on the liberal arts, the humanities, and the sciences, and graduates of liberal arts colleges perform very well in management. Philanthropic support provided by AT&T to public colleges and universities is selective, going to those that house scientific departments of significant interest to the company. Educational challenges that colleges need to meet are: resisting pressures for short-term careerism and vocationalism in the curriculum; providing students opportunities to exercise leadership on and off the campus; cultivating basic skills in discovering how to learn independently; and exposing undergraduates to the force of technology. To assist independent liberal arts colleges, AT&T has joined other companies and private foundations in forming the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, which provides technical assistance programs and targeted grant-making in marketing, curriculum, and faculty development. (SW)

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Why AT&T Supports America's Liberal Arts Colleges

by Reynold Levy

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I am a private liberal arts college graduate. No subsequent educational experience—neither an M.A. or Ph.D. nor a law degree—has worked such an indelible impact on my development.

My employer, AT&T, has in its executive ranks many productive men and women who report similar experiences. Partly as a result, AT&T, like the Bell System before it, is conspicuous for its support of independent colleges—directly to institutions and also through the Independent College Funds of America, the United Negro College Fund, the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, the Council of Independent Colleges, and the Corporate Council on the Liberal Arts, among other valuable organizations.

In no small measure, AT&T supports independent colleges for reasons not dissimilar from other donors.

We believe that this set of schools emphasizes teaching excellence. Professors tend to instruct in small settings. They tend to love their craft—conveying knowledge, fostering exploration and discovery, transmitting values, facilitating learning—and to know their students by name, as individuals. The opportunity to engage in face-to-face discussion across a table, not just an auditorium, and to meet teachers outside the classroom is treasured and protected. That kind of learning environment is reinforced by the residential emphasis of most independent schools.

We believe that students are well served by early emphasis on the liberal arts, the humanities, and the sciences. The ability to

think logically and creatively, to speak and write fluently, to master basic skills, to be reasonably well versed in the basics of history, literature, philosophy, language, political science, biology and chemistry, fine and performing arts, among other subjects, is indispensable to tackling the kinds of problems and issues confronted by professionals throughout their working lives.

We believe that the term "independent" is not without meaning or consequence. Governed by a board of trustees, supported principally by tuition and private philanthropy, the private liberal arts college can reach decisions about admissions, curriculum, and faculty development with relative freedom and speed. Such choices contribute to the pluralism of higher education in America, a factor that provides young people with a richer array of experiences and environments in their undergraduate years.



Reynold Levy is president of the AT&T Foundation in New York.

These characteristics of liberal arts colleges at their best help motivate all supporters, AT&T included. But there are special reasons motivating corporate assistance as well. We believe, indeed have demonstrated, that the products of liberal arts colleges, their graduates, perform extremely well in management.

Consider it symptomatic of AT&T's commitment to independent schools that to adduce evidence for this statement I can call to your attention the words of our company Chairman, Charles L. Brown, delivered at the University of Virginia on November 30, 1984 (see accompanying box).

In our view, the independent college at its best nurtures that broader range of skills, disciplines, and perspectives to which the Chairman referred. In its environment, the possibility of discovering the exhilaration of learning, the capacity to weigh evidence, to probe difficult problems, to ponder life's values, is high.

If AT&T is in no small measure its employee force—360,000 strong—and if among them are liberal arts college graduates, and if, in fact, they tend to fare well in our management, then supporting the sources from which those employees spring forth is little more than common sense and enlightened self-interest.

It is something else as well: a manifestation of community caring and civic commitment. To be sure, AT&T is not nearly as ubiquitous as was the Bell System. But neither is it a corner-store operation. Those 360,000 employees reside and work throughout the nation. In California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisi-

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ana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia we employ 9,000 people or more. And in all states we number among the largest private employer.

Independent colleges are a great source of local and regional pride. AT&T people share that pride. And the company demonstrates its commitment to the quality of life in the communities in which our people live and work by matching their own gifts, by direct grants, and through ICFA associations.

Concern has been expressed about the challenge posed by public colleges and universities encroaching on corporate contribution dollars. AT&T's response to this phenomenon is clear. We have given, quite literally and handsomely, at the office *and* the factory *and* the warehouse *and* the laboratory *and* the research facility as a major federal, state, and local taxpayer.

As a result, AT&T supports state institutions of higher education very heavily even if not a penny of our philanthropy found its way to public universities. The philanthropic support we do provide to public institutions is quite selective. It is confined to those that house scientific departments of significant interest to our business—physics, chemistry, electrical engineering, computer-aided design and manufacturing, computer science, and the like.

But implicit in this concern may be an unspoken assumption that I do not share. It is that private dollars, from foundations, corporations, alumni, individual benefactors, comprise a closed system—that a dollar gained from this “fixed” pool of funds by the public universities is somehow a dollar lost to private colleges. I disagree with this line of argument.

I contend that merit attracts dollars and that donors give and

give more than they would otherwise when the case is compelling, the cause attractively communicated, and the request for support flexibly posed. Philanthropy is not a zero-sum game. Competition is healthy in its marketplace no less than any other.

To the extent that independent colleges in fact rise to today's educational challenges and demonstrate their worth to attentive publics—students, alumni, policy-makers, individual donors, foundations *and* corporations—they

will fare well in a rising tide of philanthropy.

We all have our favorite wish lists of what “rising to the challenge” means. Here's mine.

- Resisting the debilitating forces of short-term, undiluted careerism and vocationalism in the curriculum, and standing steadfastly for the principle that general course offerings and knowledge should precede, and are the building blocks for, technical and the specialized studies.

(continued)

One of the most critical needs of any business is management talent. It is one thing to be a brilliant engineer [or] . . . research scientist . . . [but,] as one moves into jobs of increasing management responsibility . . . a broader range of skills, disciplines, and perspectives comes into play.

The Bell System was a pioneer not only in technology but also in areas such as industrial relations and management science.

We conducted considerable research—in fact more than any other business—on the characteristics that are critical to advancement in management. And we conducted research studies that relate college experience and training to these characteristics as well as to actual management advancement.

In 1956, some 400 newly-hired managers were tested for management potential and their progress in the business was tracked over a twenty year period. A second study, to parallel the first, was begun in 1977, involving some 340 college management hires.

Let me give you the gist of the findings and a few of the highlights of these studies. Some of them confirm conventional wisdom and even stereotypes and others slay—or at least seriously wound—some myths. For example, in terms of “characteristics” that relate to future management advancement, the humanities and social science majors outperformed business majors, engineers, and math and science majors. The tests measured administrative skills, interpersonal skills, verbal ability, quantitative ability, and motivation for advancement. The humanities majors were low in quantitative skills and the engineers scored quite high.

As far as actual advancement is concerned, over a twenty year period, a higher proportion of humanities, social science, and business majors moved into middle and upper management than engineers. And their rate of progress was faster, at least initially.

Do these studies say more about the Bell System than they do about the management potential of undergraduate majors? A legitimate question. But the general findings were confirmed in an admittedly less intensive study involving some 800 participants from ten non-Bell System organizations.

In general, other collegiate activities and experiences that demonstrate intellectual capability, motivation, and perseverance, as well as those that develop critical faculties, communication skills, leadership, and interpersonal qualities were identified as important to young men and women who want to get ahead in management.

Excerpt from speech by
 AT&T Chairman
 Charles L. Brown
 University of Virginia
 November 30, 1984

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- Providing students with authentic opportunities to exercise leadership on and off the campus.
- Cultivating the basic skills in discovering how to learn—independently, enthusiastically, aggressively.
- Exposing undergraduates to the elemental force of technology in our society. How much? Enough to acquire a measure of literacy, to understand its impact and its potential, to be comfortable with some of its products and, as in all things, to be prepared to learn more.

Those institutions that embody educational principles of their own design, whose faculty and administration are passionately committed to them and who know how to deliver them in practice, will succeed. Those that succumb to superficial appeals to evanescent market trends, to huckstering, to education by opinion poll, undermine not only their own futures but erode the very values that distinguish the case for the sector of which they are a part.

To assist schools striving under great pressure to remain true to their calling, AT&T has joined other companies and private foundations in forming the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education. Through CAPHE's targeted grant-making in marketing, curriculum, and faculty development, and through its technical assistance programs, our objective is to reinforce the latent strengths of independent colleges. By "getting closer to the knitting," by fostering collaboration between private foundations and corporations, and with the help of professional peer panels, we hope also to learn more about the dynamics of liberal arts colleges today. We are proud to be able to participate in this venture and, together with Sohio and Prudential, we shall invite other companies to join us on the same terms.

I believe that the rationale for support of independent colleges is at least as strong today as it ever was. That sense is widely shared within AT&T today. Given your challenges within academe and ours now in competitive markets, the ways in which we can benefit from one another's work and good will is sure to grow. 4 ■

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